



# The Barn

1 The barn was old. It had once been painted a bright red, but now it was faded, covered with peeling paint. It looked abandoned. Inside, though, the barn was spotless. Harnesses hung neatly from hooks. Hay bales were stacked carefully from the floor to the ceiling. Three lanterns stood at the end of a bench that was near the large doors. In the far back corner, there were two old mattresses, each covered with worn blankets. Between the mattresses stood an old crate that held two pairs of blue jeans, some shirts, socks, and a photograph of a woman holding a small boy as an older boy stood next to them.

2 Suddenly, the smaller side door to the barn flew open. Two people, one a boy about twelve years of age, the other a young man, rushed into the barn and slammed the door.

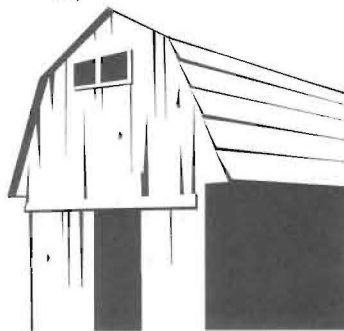
3 “I can’t believe you did it again,” the younger boy shouted, his face red with anger and streaked with tears. “You promised,” he shouted.

4 “I’m sorry. It just happened. Now be quiet and let me think,” his older brother hissed back as he lit a match to light a lantern. He carried the lantern back to the mattresses and set it on a nearby hay bale.

5 “You swore we could stay here, Tom. You swore there would be no more running.”

6 “I said be quiet, Daniel,” his brother hissed again. “Let me think.”

7 The younger boy sat on his makeshift bed and wrapped his arms around his legs. He reached out to touch the photograph as if to assure himself that it was still there. *I wish I had more than this stupid picture, he thought. I wonder if I’ll ever see her again.* He hadn’t seen his mother for a couple of months at least; not since he’d been on the move with his brother, Tom. Their once safe lives were now a hectic blur of trying to stay one step ahead of the authorities. Tom’s crime was serious. It was only a matter of time before the sheriff would figure it all out. Daniel was sick of it.





## The Barn (cont'd)

- 8 "Look, kid," Tom said. "Mother's not here. Maybe we'll be able to see her again one day. But right now, I'm all you've got."
- 9 "Great," Daniel said with disgust. "A liar *and* a thief. You promised no more stealing. You promised you'd get a job. But no. You had to go and steal again. And now they're after you."
- 10 The older brother took a canvas bag off a peg and said, "Put your things in here, Daniel. Now. We're leaving."
- 11 "No," said the boy.
- 12 "What do you mean, no? You saw those men. They're riding hard and they'll find this barn soon enough. I don't plan to be here when they do."
- 13 "Fine. You leave. I'm staying."
- 14 "You can't stay. Now, you can walk out those doors with me or I can carry you out. But you aren't staying."
- 15 "I'm staying. I'm not running anymore, Tom. I'm not the thief. You can run. But I'm staying."
- 16 "What do you think they'll do to you? Let you stay in this barn? Hah! They'll lock you up and then send you off to one of those orphanages. You want that? You want to be an orphan?" Tom said as he pulled Daniel up. "Now pack."
- 17 "No," said the boy. "I'm staying."
- 18 Tom threw the bag at his younger brother, expecting him to catch it. But Daniel wasn't prepared for the force of the throw and fell backward as the bag crashed into his stomach. He landed on the hay bale, knocking the lantern over. Instantly, the brothers smelled the smoke and saw licks of flame from the lantern quickly spread to the dry hay. Flames were leaping upward as smoke filled the barn.
- 19 "Run!" Tom shouted as he pulled Daniel to his feet.
- 20 They quickly ran outside to safety as fire spread across the old barn.
- 21 Then Tom looked across the field and saw men riding fast on horses. "We gotta run!" he screamed. He started running through the field, hoping to hide in the tall stalks of corn.
- 22 But Daniel didn't run. He stood alone, watching the barn burn. Tom looked once over his shoulder for Daniel, but he knew that his younger brother wouldn't follow.